

Message Text

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21

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2198

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMEMBASSY GABORONE

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 2475

E.O. 11652: GDS-1

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, MILI, WA, AO

SUBJ: ACTING SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENSE CHIEF DENIES SWAPO
MILITARY BUILD-UP

REF: A) PRETORIA 2462

B) LUANDA 0854 (NOTAL)

1. ACTING CHIEF OF SA DEFENSE FORCE, GENERAL R.F. ARMSTRONG HAS REBUKED BRIG. D.R. MARAIS, COMMANDER OF SA FORCES IN NAMIBIA, FOR SPEAKING OUT OF TURN AND HAS PURPOSELY CAST DOUBT ON MARAIS' ALLEGATIONS THAT SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF SWAPO GUERRILLAS ARE COMBAT-READY ON NAMIBIA-ANGOLA BORDER (REF A). ARMSTRONG SAID, "THE PICTURE PORTRAYED BY BRIGADIER MARAIS BEARS NO RELATION TO THE SITUATION AS IT IS AT PRESENT".

2. ACCORDING PRESS REPORTS, ARMSTRONG SAID THAT WHILE SOME OVAMBOS HAVE RECEIVED MILITARY TRAINING AND COULD BE ON
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THE BORDER, "THEY ARE DEFINITELY NOT PRESENT IN MILITARILY

SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS." ANOTHER DEFENSE FORCE SPOKESMAN SAID THAT "NO INFORMATION" IS AVAILABLE CONFIRMING MARAIS' CLAIM THAT 2-3000 SWAPO EXILES ARE UNDERGOING TRAINING, BUT REFUSED TO CHARACTERIZE FIGURES AS INACCURATE.

3. COMMENT: DEFENSE FORCE ATTEMPTS TO DISCREDIT MARAIS' ESTIMATE OF SWAPO STRENGTH SHIRT BASIC ISSUE. PRESENCE OF ARMED AND TRAINED SWAPO EXILES IS POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT WHETHER OR NOT ACTUAL NUMBERS ARE MILITARILY SIGNIFICANT. ONE PROBABLE FACTOR BEHIND OFFICIAL DISAVOWAL IS FACT THAT SAG DOES NOT WANT TO LEND ADDITIONAL PRESTIGE TO SWAPO, WHICH RECOGNITION OF IT AS IMMINENT MILITARY THREAT WOULD PROVIDE. SAG ALSO PROBABLY CONCERNED THAT GROWING WHITE FEARS OF BLACK "RADICAL" AMBITION COULD BE FANNED BY THOUGHT OF POTENTIAL INVADING ARMY ON BORDER.

4. PERHAPS MOST SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT OF MARAIS' STATEMENT WAS HIS IDENTIFICATION OF MPLA AS GREATEST THREAT AMONG ANGOLAN LIBERATION FORCES TO SAG INTERESTS. POST HAS NO INFORMATION TO CONFIRM STORY OF SAG-FNLA MEETING REPORTED REF B, BUT GIVEN OBVIOUS ANTIPATHY TO MPLA, AS EXPRESSED BY MARAIS, POSSIBILITY OF SUCH SAG ACTIVITY SHOULD NOT BE DISMISSED OUT OF HAND.
BOWDLER

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